

# Analysis on Dieting System of Shaolin Temple with Modern Nutritional Theory

---

*Li Ning 宁莉 – Shaolin Temple Institute of Zen Medical Kung Fu of China*

In the beginning of year 2012, the health ministry of China announced that the mortality rate caused by diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia, stroke, and several other non-contagious diseases has risen from 80% to 85% among the total mortality rate. These diseases which are mainly caused by unbalanced nutrition and unhealthy diet, are a huge threat to people and even the whole country enormously.

Such diseases are mainly caused by high proportion of animal meat in dieting or food with relatively large amount of calories, little amount of minerals, vitamins, and dietary fibers. Thus, lots of people believe that vegetarianism would be the cure. What would be the result of that? Does vegetarian diet really could help with the treatment of those diseases? The facts from research show that there would be two situations. Some vegetarians start to strengthen their knowledge on their own health, recognize and correct their bad living and dieting habits, change their attitudes towards life and wealth significantly, and care less about fame and materials after they find out about their poor health condition. Therefore, this group of people feel more happiness than others since their minds tend to be psychologically peaceful. In the meantime, vegetarians tend to be more knowledgeable on health than meat consumers. Their indifferent attitude towards carnivorousness and wealth is extremely helpful for keeping healthy and treatment of diseases. From a nutritional perspective, all the sulfur, phosphorus, chlorine, and other acidic elements in meat could lead to fatigue. On the other hand, beans, fungus, algae, vegetables, fruits, tea leaves and some other vegetarian food are all alkaline and could neutralize the acidification of body fluids to normal level in order to make the body remain to a more normal state and more functional in accomplishing working and social tasks. From an epidemiological perspective, many obese people's weight becomes less, blood sugar remains steady, blood pressure stabilizes, blood lipids normalizes, and blood viscosity improves after they reduce the amount of meat intake. Thus, they gain more self-confidence and also both inner and outer refreshment. The more confident they feel about themselves, the healthier they would become.

However, the other situation is shockingly opposite. There are certain amount of vegetarians become less healthy after long-term of vegetarian diet. Serious health problem happen to them such as dyslipidemia, atherosclerosis, and high blood pressure. Why does this happen?

Vegetarian obesity, dyslipidemia, atherosclerosis and other issues could be caused by three main factors:

### 1. Excessive food-intake intake

Some vegetarians eat more at the overall level, because they think that vegetarian food does not affect health at all. This kind of overly ingesting could cause unnecessary and excessive calories intake. Food like fast noodle, fried products, sweet soda, preserved fruits, or canned desserts could all cause obesity or furthermore hyperlipidemia, high blood sugar, and high blood pressure, even though they are vegetarian. Therefore, the truly healthy way of vegetarian dieting is not only to not ingest eggs, milk, fish and meat, but to stay far away food that contains high level of fats, sugar, and salt.

### 2. Excessive vegetable oil intake

In terms of providing energy, vegetable oils are not less efficient comparing to animal oils. In other words, excessively ingesting vegetable oil could also lead to obesity and dyslipidemia. In fact, the energy produced by cooking with vegetable oil is even three to four times more than the energy derived from the same weighed lean meat.

### 3. Long-term lacking of Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 is the most special nutrient among all nutrients because it nearly only exists in animal meat. There is little Vitamin B12 exists in edible mushrooms. Other than that, there is barely Vitamin B12 in any other natural vegetal food. Therefore, long-term vegetarian diet could easily lead to lack of Vitamin B12 and furthermore a disease called “high homocysteine”, which could lead to artery endothelial cell injury resulting in increasing of the “oxidized low-density lipoprotein” in blood. It increases the risk of having arteriosclerosis severely. Homocysteine is transformed from dietary methionine in human bodies. However, it could not be further metabolized unless there is folic acid, which requires Vitamin B12 in participation. Therefore, when there is no Vitamin B12, the metabolizability of homocysteine would be weakened, the level of serum homocysteine would be raised, and the risk of having arteriosclerosis would be increased. This is the mechanism of arteriosclerosis caused by high homocysteine.

The mechanism also explains the reason why atherosclerosis also happens to some people who do not eat animal meat.

To avoid lacking of Vitamin B12, one should

1. Ingest food or dietary supplements with strengthened Vitamin B12;
2. Consume fermented soy products daily. It has been shown along with the development of the science of food processing that fermented food products such as natto, tempeh, and fermented soybean contain a certain amount of Vitamin B12. As a matter of fact, natural vegetal food like soybeans could actually produce Vitamin B12 through microbial fermentation. Moreover, since natto and tempeh contain high quality protein (which is the

most lacking element by vegetarian dieters), lecithin, and essential elements for human bodies such as fatty acid, plant sterols, and dietary fibers, which are elements that are effective to maintaining healthy status and remedying dyslipidemia, it is recommended to consume fermented soy products daily for vegetarian dieters.

3. Eat dairy products. A certain amount of dairy products taken each day in order to effectively supplement Vitamin B12 is called lacto-vegetarian. The adequate intakes (AI) for adults on Vitamin B12 that the Chinese Nutrition Society recommends is 2.4µg. If one ingests 500g of milk daily, 80% of the AI on Vitamin B12 would be met.

The monastery of Shaolin Temple offers milk plus a certain amount of fermented soy products for dieters in order to prevent lack of Vitamin B12. The dieting arrangement has significant meaning on avoiding homocysteine.

Buddhists retain dairy in their vegetarian diet for a religious reason. “Shepherdess’s chyle saves Sakyamuni” is a classic story from Buddhist legends that could explain the reason. It is said that Sakyamuni was a prince who was apprenticed to monasticism and asceticism alone. He became extremely skinny like dead wood since he had not been eating properly for a very long period of time. One day after showering, he fainted by the water. Fortunately, a shepherdess passed by and dedicated a bowl of chyle to him. He thus came back to life. The experience had taught Sakyamuni a lesson that torturing does not help one forgetting desire, clarifying minds, and eliminating filth. Thus, it cannot lead one to true relief. From then on, the prince started to ingest again, and therefore gained his health back. He finally understood the meaning of life from the life and death experience and became the master of Buddhism.

The truth on how to deal with the relationship between nutrition and people’s health which delivered by the story of Sakyamuni has been inspiring people magnificently even nowadays. It is a “non-linear” relationship which could further interpreted as, if supply of nutrients exceeds a certain threshold per capita, there would be “unnecessary nutrition excess” resulted and the average life expectancy would fall instead of rise; if, on the other hand, supply of nutrients does not meet the proper standard, one’s body would lose the most basic physical properties and production capacities.