

## MAIL TODAY

### Being a meat eater has several health benefits



BY RITUPARNA MUKHERJEE

**L**ET'S GET one thing straight—meat is good for us. No matter how hoarse the veggie brigade may become shouting in favour of their choice, there is absolutely no doubt about the pros of being a meat eater.

Of course meat or chicken must be prepared in a healthy way to optimise the health benefits: mounds of deep fried chicken wings or mutton *kormas* dripping with oil certainly doesn't constitute healthy eating. But baked chicken or grilled lean meat can contribute much to your well-being.

A strictly veggie diet lacks essential vitamins such as Vitamin B12 and nutrients like Omega3 fatty acids. Those who favour uncooked vegetables are also at risk of ingesting bugs like tapeworms that are settled on those juicy heads of lettuce and greens, as well as the chemicals that vegetables are doused with. "The water sprinkled on vegetables to keep them fresh is usually contaminated, so is the water used to irrigate the fields. Tapeworm larvae thrive in such water especially since pigs and humans use the fields and ponds as their private lavatories," says Dr Sanjeev Dua, senior consultant neurologist, Fortis Healthcare. Those of you who love your greens must remember to fortify yourselves with supplements to make up for the lack of nutrients and wash your vegetables thoroughly (preferably in a potassium permanganate solution) to kill those germs.

#### ■ GREATEST GAIN IS PROTEIN

Meat eaters are regularly lambasted for their insensitivity to animal life and contributing to global warming. Climate hazard aside, a diet predominant in meat — especially the red variety like pork, mutton and beef — can be the harbinger for cholesterol and cancer. But if one is disease free and considering giving up meat to get "healthier", it's a good idea for you to educate yourself about the health benefits of meat. The high quality protein in meats is the greatest gain of non-vegetarianism. Proteins are essential simply because they help in the growth and repair of the body.

From hair to fingernails, protein is a major component of all our cells and provides the body with roughly 10 to 15 per cent of its energy. "The protein from animal sources contains the full range of essential amino acids required by the body," says Dr Sakshi Chawla, chief dietician, Fortis Hospital. Whereas vegetarian food items like *dal* also contain protein, protein derived from vegetables sources lacks certain essential amino acids and need to be fortified with other foods like cereal to make up for the lack. "Plants don't contain all the essential amino acids so

lack the nutritional content animal protein," says Honey Khanna, dietician, Max Hospital.

#### ■ BOOSTS IMMUNITY TOO

Those recovering from illness or major surgery are better off if they are non vegetarians, adds Khanna. Avid gym goers, too, benefit from being non vegetarian as the high quality protein helps repair tissue and muscle tears sustained in a work out; builds muscle mass and boosts the immune system. Animal protein also stays in the system for longer, mitigating the impulse to snack between meals. Always choose sources of low fat protein which will help in overall health as well as give a boost to healthy cholesterol levels and cardiovascular health. No matter how much you enjoy your meat, make sure that you eat only 60-75 grams of meat per day and not more than thrice a week, say nutritionists. Also pick chicken and egg whites instead of mutton or beef, which contains high levels of saturated fat. If you like red meat, stick to small portions with the fat trimmed off. Eating meat in burgers and at KFC doesn't qualify as healthy because all the nutrients are done away with during preparation.

#### ■ ESSENTIAL NUTRIENT SOURCE

"The only reliable unfortified sources of vitamin B12, an essential vitamin, are meat, dairy products and eggs," says Dr

Chawla. This vitamin is absolutely essential for the functioning of the nervous system and the production of red blood cells. Vitamin B12 is essential especially for pregnant women as those with low levels of this vitamin risk giving birth to babies with brain or spinal cord defects. "Vegetarians need to make sure their diet is fortified with B12 supplements as it is vital for health. Vegetarians who avoid milk and dairy products may have calcium deficiency too," says Geetika Ahluwalia, dietician, Delhi Heart and Lung Institute. Meat is also an excellent source of iron. A deficiency of this combined with a lack of Vitamin B12 can lead to anaemia. Unlike the iron in plant foods, that obtained from meat and its products is more easily absorbed by the body.

#### ■ FISHY BENEFITS

Omega3 fatty acids are found only fish and are essential for the body. These help to raise good cholesterol - HDL- and lower bad cholesterol - LDL, which is the root cause of many heart diseases. Moreover, fish is also a great source of vitamins - B3, B6 and B12 and those who are regular eaters of fish, especially the salt water variety, receive generous amounts of iodine, phosphorus and calcium. Vegetarians can obtain this in a minuscule quantity from nuts and are generally prescribed supplements such as cod liver oil capsules, to fortify their diet. Proteins contribute to about 17-20 per cent of any fish and small fish eaten with bones like sardines have a high content of calcium. "Make sure fish is either grilled or baked, deep frying will kill every single beneficial nutrient it contains and help up the saturated fat content," warns Geetika.

#### ■ INCLUDE FIBRE

So while you embark on your meaty diet with gusto, do include 5 daily portions of vegetables and fruit. "Though meat is rich in nutrients, a non-veg diet doesn't contain any kind of fibre, which is necessary to keep your digestive system in order," says Dr Chawla.

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# MEATY MATTERS

#### HEALTHY HEART

For a healthy heart snack, eat stewed apple with cinnamon. The quercetin in the apples act as an inflammatory while cinnamon helps keep the insulin levels stable. Also, eat plenty of broccoli - it helps boost levels of a heart protective protein called thioredoxin

