

[US Physicians Say Meat Not Necessary](#)

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Recent Nutritional Research Affirms Superiority of the Vegetarian Diet for Humans

Thirty-five years ago the US Department of Agriculture said we should daily eat from four food groups: 1) meat, fish and poultry; 2) grains; 3) dairy products; and 4) fruits and vegetables. On April 9th the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, a prestigious nonprofit organization active in health and research policy and based in Washington D.C., said basing our diet on those groups not only will not insure adequate nutrition, consumption of meat, fish, poultry and dairy products actually cause disease. Instead PCRM proposes a "New Four Food Groups." They are 1) fruits, 2) grains, 3) vegetables and 4) legumes. Meat and dairy products are relegated to mere "optional at best" diet items. This is a very significant development for Hindus whose traditional vegetarian diet - which easily fulfills the requirements of the "new" groups - has been under attack in many countries by physicians sharing the common ignorance of western medicine toward diet. For example, physicians in Malaysia and Mauritius have insisted that mothers feed their children meat - "A real mistake," Dr. Barnard told HINDUISM TODAY, leading to all sorts of diseases such as colic, juvenile diabetes, diarrhea and later problems such as cancer of the colon. Our medical columnist, Dr. Devananda Tandavan, points out that the average doctor in American has had almost no training whatsoever in nutrition by the time he has finished medical school and may remain ignorant for the rest of his professional life on the importance of diet for good health.

Though others have made similar recommendations to revise the American diet, none have done so with quite the authority of the 3,000-member PCRM. The committee's president, Dr. Neal D. Barnard - himself a vegetarian - is associate director of Behavioral Studies at the Institute for Disease Prevention at George Washington University. PCRM members instrumental in formulating the new food groups include Dr. T. Colin Campbell, Professor of Nutritional Biochemistry at Cornell University and Director of the massive China Health Project. Collaborator Dr. Oliver Alabaster is Director of the Institute for Disease Prevention at the George Washington University Medical Center.

How did we end up with such a poor choice of food groups 35 years ago? Inadequate nutritional research, for one thing. But more insidiously, since food guides were first established in 1916, there has been a tendency to give animal products a "preferred" designation. "This element of food guides has persisted until the present time, due in part to the intensive lobbying efforts of the food industry, and despite evidence of the adverse health effects of such foods," says the PCRM report. The situation is similar to the tobacco industry's continued denial of the harmful effects of smoking. In response to the new four food groups, a former US Secretary of Agriculture, John R. Block, (president of the National-American Wholesale Grocer's Association and a pig farmer in Illinois) denounced the committee's recommendations as "the height of irresponsibility," Other reactions focused more on the difficulty of altering the food habits of the steak- and burger-eating American public than on the scientific validity of the new diet.

PCRM attacks the traditional four food groups on three major fronts. First, they say, "The old four food groups fails to assure nutrient adequacy." The four food groups were established according to the understanding of nutritional needs in 1953. Since that time, the required daily allowances (RDA's) for protein, vitamins, minerals, etc. have been extensively revised and expanded. A 1978 study showed that only 9 of the 17 RDA's were met by the typical diet based on the old groups.

The second problem is that "The old four food groups fail to adequately address the current dietary problems of our population." Specifically, the 1977-78 Nationwide Food Consumption Survey "indicates that Americans who eat diets based on the four food groups consume an excessive amount of fat." Studies show that dietary fat and the associated consumption of excess protein is related to breast cancer, heart disease, obesity, kidney disease and osteoporosis, to name a few.

Third, states the PCRM, "The old four food groups serves to misinform consumers about some aspects of nutrition. Two of the four food groups - meats and dairy products - are clearly not necessary for health and, in fact, may be detrimental to health...Populations with the lowest rates of heart disease, colon and breast cancer, and obesity consume very little meat or no meat at all."

The PCRM concludes that "The average adult can meet nutrient needs by consuming five servings of grains, three servings of legumes, three servings of vegetables and three servings of fruit each day." In other words, the traditional

Hindu vegetarian diet.

THE NEW FOUR FOOD GROUPS

Whole Grains

This group includes rice, bread, pasta, hot or cold cereal, corn, millet, barley, bulgur, buckwheat groats and tortillas. Build each of your meals around a hearty grain dish. Grains are rich in fiber and other complex carbohydrates, as well as protein, B vitamins and zinc.

Vegetables

Vegetables are packed with nutrients; they provide vitamin C, beta-carotene, riboflavin and other vitamins, iron, calcium and fiber. Dark green, leafy vegetables such as broccoli, collards, kale, mustard and turnip greens, chicory or bok choy are especially good sources of these important nutrients. Dark yellow and orange vegetables such as carrots, winter squash, sweet potatoes and pumpkin provide extra beta-carotene. Include generous portions or a variety of vegetables in your diet.

Legumes

Legumes, which is another name for beans, peas and lentils, are all good sources of fiber, protein, iron, calcium, zinc and B vitamins. This group also includes dais, pulses, chickpeas, baked and refried beans, soy milk, tofu, and texturized vegetable protein.

Fruit

Fruits are rich in fiber, vitamin C and beta carotene. Be sure to include at least one serving each day of fruits that are high in vitamin C - citrus fruits, melons and strawberries are all good choices. Choose whole fruit over fruit juices, which don't contain as much healthy fiber.

Food Group Number of Typical Items and Serving Size

Servings

Whole Grains 5 or more [?] cup hot cereal * 1 oz. dry cereal *

1 slice of bread

Vegetables 3 or more 1 cup raw * [?] cup cooked

Legumes 2 to 3 [?] cup cooked beans * 4 oz. tofu or tempeh *

Fruits 3 or more 1 medium piece of fruit * [?] cup cooked

fruit *

Be sure to include a good source of Vitamin B-12 For vegetarians, food sources are fortified cereals and vitamin supplements.

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