Being a Vegetarian

Being a vegetarian means different things to different people. For some, it means adopting a meatless diet, but continuing to eat fish and shellfish. Others give up eating animals altogether, making the statement that they will not eat “anything with a face”—their way of deciding the appropriateness of any given food. A third group removes all animal products from their diets as well. These people are called vegans, and they do not eat eggs or cheese, or drink milk. Their diet consists entirely of plant products, such as grains, fruits, and vegetables. Some vegans also exclude honey, since bees produce it. Many vegans also remove animal products from other aspects of their lives, wearing only leatherless shoes and clothing, for example.

Vegetarians and vegans have many reasons for their dietary choice, although most are in agreement that they wish to adopt a lifestyle that is harmless to all animals—including humans. Others believe that a diet that avoids meat is more healthful and promotes wellness. They feel that the diet contributes to an improvement in their health. Others believe that raising animals uses too many resources and is harmful to the environment. Still others have a commitment to a religion that forbids harming animals.

The practice is ancient, but the term vegetarian was first used in England in the 1840s and gained wide use around the world. Vegetarianism has become more widespread in the United States in recent years, leading to most restaurants offering meatless, eggless, and dairy-free options on their menus.