



Letter to the Editor Concerning: Borude, S (2019). Which Is a Good Diet—Veg or Non-veg? Faith-Based Vegetarianism for Protection from Obesity—a Myth or Actuality?

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To the Editor:

I would like to thank you and the author of the manuscript “Which Is a Good Diet-Veg or Non-veg? Faith-Based Vegetarianism for Protection From Obesity-a Myth or Actuality?” for sharing the results of his recently published retrospective cohort study [1]. The findings from this study are of paramount importance for two reasons. First of all, this study emphasizes again that not all vegetarian diets are equally healthy diets. Second, this study serves as an important reminder that physicians should actively discourage the consumption of refined and highly processed foods. The latter have been associated with an increase in cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases in a recently published prospective cohort study by Srour et al. [2].

Not all plant foods are necessarily beneficial for health, and despite technically being vegetarian, the frequent consumption of processed foods such as juices, sweetened beverages, refined grains, and sweets may have a devastating impact on our health [3].

In the current study, Borude investigated on the number of vegetarians versus non-vegetarians undergoing bariatric surgery in an Asian Indian cohort [1]. The author concluded that “vegetarian dietary patterns were associated with a higher incidence of morbid obesity culminating in bariatric surgery” in the included study population. It is noteworthy, however, that this study included only patients suffering from morbid obesity. This may lead to bias and does not necessarily reflect the general population.

In fact, several large prospective cohort studies identified significant differences between non-vegetarian and vegetarian diets in terms of body mass index (BMI) and metabolic syndrome prevalence. In the Adventist Health Study 2, a non-

vegetarian diet was associated with a significantly higher BMI (28.8 ± 6.3 kg/m²) when compared with several other types of vegetarian diets such as a pescovegetarian diet (BMI 26.3 ± 5.2 kg/m²) or a lactoovovegetarian diet (BMI 25.7 ± 5.1 kg/m²) [4]. Of note, individuals following a vegan diet had the lowest BMI (23.6 ± 4.4 kg/m²) in this study. Comparable results have been found in the EPIC–Oxford cohort including 65,429 participants [5].

Vegetarian diets in both the Adventist Health Study 2 and the EPIC–Oxford study were associated with lower BMI values. In contrast to these findings, Borude emphasized that the vegetarian status in his study “did not confer any protective effect on the propensity to be morbidly obese and undergoing bariatric surgery” [1]. The author thoroughly discussed potential influencing variables and emphasized on differences in vegetarianism between Asian (India) and Western countries.

In this context, I would like to add that another study by Jaacks et al. revealed, at least to some extent, contradicting results [6]. The authors examined a large representative sample of adults in South Asia and the USA. They concluded that in both populations, vegetarians had a lower probability of obesity; however, this association seemed to be stronger for US vegetarian diets.

Again, the possibility remains that the included patient cohort in the study by Borude could potentially lead to bias. Nevertheless, one of the key messages remains: we must (actively) “promote healthy vegetarian food choices.” I would like to thank the author for this clear statement.

This core statement is of paramount importance, not only in the context of health questions but also considering environmental and social issues. Given the global population explosion and increase in wealth [7], food security and food sustainability are key topics of our time. Let us not forget about our obligation and privileged duty as physicians to protect global human and environmental health. In this context, promoting meatless and plant-based diets is a key aspect and

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perhaps “one of the most rational and moral paths” [7] to ensure a sustainable future for the human race and all other living creatures on this planet.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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