

**WHO HAVE THE BETTER NUTRITIONAL STATUS: VEGETARIANS OR NON-VEGETARIANS?**

Vegetarian diets have recently become increasingly popular among people due to health, social and religious reasons. Although epidemiological studies have shown that vegetarian diets have potential benefits in preventing chronic diseases such as obesity, hypertension, coronary disease, diabetes mellitus, breast cancer and colon cancer, potential nutritional deficiencies have been suggested by some studies. The present study was conducted to compare the nutritional status of pre-menopausal lacto-ovo-vegetarian and non vegetarian women by comparing dietary intakes and anthropometrics profiles. Thirty lacto-ovo-vegetarian and thirty non-vegetarian healthy females living in a working girl's hostel in Colombo (mean age of 25 years)

were recruited by using self-administrated, lifestyle and health questionnaire. Weight, height, waist and hip circumferences were measured. A three-day food record was used for dietary assessment. The intakes of selected nutrients by two groups were calculated using Food Base 2000 computer application modified with the inclusion of Sri Lankan food compositions.

Vegetarians had significantly lower BMI (21) than non-vegetarians (23) ( $p < 0.05$ ), but the waist/ hip ratios were not significantly different between them.

The vegetarian diet provided significantly lower amounts of energy, protein, fat and cholesterol than non-vegetarians ( $p < 0.001$ ). The vegetarians consumed significantly lower amounts of iron, zinc, and vitamin B12 compared with non-vegetarians ( $p < 0.05$ ). But vegetarians had significantly higher intake of vitamin C than non-vegetarians ( $p < 0.05$ ). Vegetarians showed higher potential of obtaining fiber compared with non-vegetarians as shown by the food items they consumed. Non-vegetarians consumed significantly higher amounts of Zn, and Vitamin C than reference nutrient intake (RNI) whereas the vegetarians consumed significantly lower amounts of energy, Zn, and B12 compared with RNI ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Although the vegetarian diets were lower in fat and cholesterol than the non-vegetarians (which is associated with potential benefits in preventing chronic diseases), particular emphasis must be given to the consumption of zinc, and vitamin B12.