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By John Amis, AP

USA TODAY

Your Life

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The toll on your waistline

Divorces for men and marriages for women promote weight gains that may be large enough to pose a health risk, a new study finds.

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By Julia Schmalz, USA TODAY

Clinton's a vegan, but is the diet unimpeachable?

He has battled heart disease and eliminated meat, but experts say not everyone can do it

By Nanci Hellmich
USA TODAY

Where's the beef? Not in Bill Clinton's diet. The former president, known for his love of burgers, barbecue and junk food, has gone from a meat lover to a vegan, the strictest form of a vegetarian diet. He says he eats fruits, vegetables and beans but no red meat, chicken or dairy.

Clinton, 65, who had quadruple bypass surgery in 2004 and then stent surgery in 2010, is following this eating plan to improve his heart health.

He talked about his plant-based diet last year, saying he lost 24 pounds on it for daughter Chelsea's wedding. He chatted about it again recently on TV, drawing national attention to the potential health benefits of this type of diet.

"Veganism is the most extreme type of vegetarianism," says Marion Nestle, a nutrition professor at New York University.

About 3% of U.S. adults are considered full-fledged vegetarians because they never eat meat, poultry, fish or seafood, and about 1% of people are vegans because they also never eat dairy, eggs or honey, says the Vegetarian Resource Group. "The percentage of vegetarians has doubled since 1994," says John Cunningham, consumer research manager for the organization.

Elizabeth Turner, editor in chief of *Vegetarian Times*, says: "A much larger number of people — 22 million based on a poll the magazine did in 2008 — are what I'd describe as vegetarian-inclined. These are the people who might have the occasional chicken or fish. They're interested in vegetarianism and moving in a veg direction, but they aren't all the way there yet."

"What the science shows is that people who are vegetarians have a lower risk of heart disease and cancer, especially colon cancer, and they tend to live longer," Turner says. "They're also less likely to be overweight."

But, "a vegetarian diet is not by definition a healthy one. You can't just replace meat with french fries," she says. "What makes a great vegetarian diet is eating whole foods that come from the earth like whole grains, fruits, vegetables, beans and nuts. Beans are the ultimate source of protein, and they are loaded with fiber."

Clinton says he was inspired to follow a low-fat, plant-based diet by several doctors, including Dean Ornish, author of *Dr. Dean Ornish's Program for Reversing Heart Disease*. Ornish has been working with Clinton as one of his consulting physicians since 1993.

After Clinton's angioplasty and stents in 2010, Ornish says he contacted the former president "and I indicated that the moderate diet and lifestyle changes he'd made didn't go far enough to prevent his heart disease from progressing, but our research proved that more intensive changes could actually reverse it," he says.

"Heart disease is a food-borne illness," says Caldwell Esselstyn Jr., author of *Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease*. He advocates going "cold turkey from the typical fatty, meat-laden, dairy-rich Western diet."

Gina Lundberg, a spokeswoman for the American Heart Association, says a vegan diet is wonderful if people can follow it. "But it's so limited in variety and taste that people get sick of it, and they don't stick to it."

Nestle says the vegan diet "is probably good for President Clinton, but whether it is good for everybody is a subject of much debate."

"Whatever they (vegans) do personally is fine," she says, "but I don't want them telling me that if I eat a little meat, there is something wrong with my diet. I think animal foods can have a place in a healthful diet."



Photos by AP

The era of big Clinton is over: The former president was looking heavy on the golf course in this 1996 photo, but he was noticeably slimmer in this picture from earlier this year. That's because of a vegan diet he adopted in 2010.



Photo Disc

Even a vegetarian diet can be unhealthy if...

A vegetarian diet can be a healthy one if people avoid certain pitfalls, says registered dietitian Dawn Jackson Blatner, author of *The Flexitarian Diet* and a blogger at food.usatoday.com. Here are some common mistakes vegetarians make:

- ▶ **Eating usual meals minus meat.** Just opting out of meat will lead to a diet low in protein, iron and zinc, Blatner says. So instead, you need to swap in plant proteins, such as beans and legumes, that can provide the essential nutrients and help keep hunger at bay, she says.
- ▶ **No-veggie vegetarian.** "This mistake is also known as the 'beige diet,' with a focus on dull-colored carbohydrate foods such as bread, pasta, rice." Each meal and snack should have colorful, disease-fighting produce to get optimal health benefits and to keep calories in check, she says.
- ▶ **Faux-meat fixation.** "You know you are guilty of this if you look in your fridge and see too many veggie burgers, 'chicken' nuggets and veggie lunchmeats," she says. These are fine in a pinch, but indulging regularly in these veggie conveniences results in too much processed food that is too high in sodium.
- ▶ **Vegan health halo.** The word "vegan" or "vegetarian" on a package is not a synonym for healthy, Blatner says. Even if a cookie, cake or fries are veggie-friendly, these are still junk foods that should be enjoyed in moderation, she says.
- ▶ **Cheeseaholic.** Some vegetarians rely only on cheese to get protein, eating foods such as cheese sandwiches, cheese on pasta and cheese and crackers for a snack, Blatner says. Overdoing it on cheese ends up being too high in calories and saturated fat, she says.

Where your LDL ought to be

U.S. guidelines for LDL cholesterol levels:

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Less than 100 mg/dL | Optimal |
| 100 to 129 mg/dL | Near or above optimal |
| 130 to 159 | Borderline high |
| 160 to 189 | High |
| 190 or above | Very high |

Eating right can do a number on bad cholesterol

Foods known to lower your total cholesterol take a bite out of LDL

By Nanci Hellmich
USA TODAY

Nutrition experts have known for years that some foods, such as oatmeal, nuts and soy products, lower cholesterol.

Now, a new study shows that a diet with several of these foods can decrease LDL (bad) cholesterol significantly.

David Jenkins of St. Michael's Hospital and the University of Toronto and colleagues recruited 345 Canadian men and women with high cholesterol. Their LDL (bad) cholesterol was an average of about 170 mg/dL at the beginning of the study.

All participants in the study were following heart-healthy diets low in saturated fat (butter, beef fat) and rich in fruits and vegetables, beans and whole grains, Jenkins says. Those in the control group stuck with their healthy diets.

Others in the intervention group were taught how to incorporate four cholesterol-lowering types of foods into their eating plan, including nuts; soy products; foods rich in viscous fiber (a type of soluble fiber); and plant-sterol-enriched margarine.



McDonald's

Good for you: Oatmeal is rich in viscous fiber.

Example of those on a 2,000-calorie-a-day diet:

- ▶ An average of a handful of nuts a day.
- ▶ A couple of teaspoons of sterol-enriched margarine such as Take Control.
- ▶ Two servings a day of soy-protein products, such as a glass of soy milk and a soy burger.
- ▶ Two servings a day of viscous-fiber-rich foods such as oatmeal, psyllium-enriched cereals, barley and vegetables such as okra and eggplant.

The findings, after 24 weeks, are reported in this week's *Journal of the American Medical Association*:

- ▶ **LDL cholesterol in the control group:** Dropped by an average of about 3% or about 8 mg/dL.
- ▶ **LDL cholesterol in the participants eating cholesterol-lowering foods:** Decreased by about 13% to 14% or about 26 mg/dL.

"We fed people cholesterol-lowering foods, they worked, and you can buy them at the supermarket," Jenkins says. "If you enrich a good diet with these foods, you get a very respectable reduction in cholesterol."

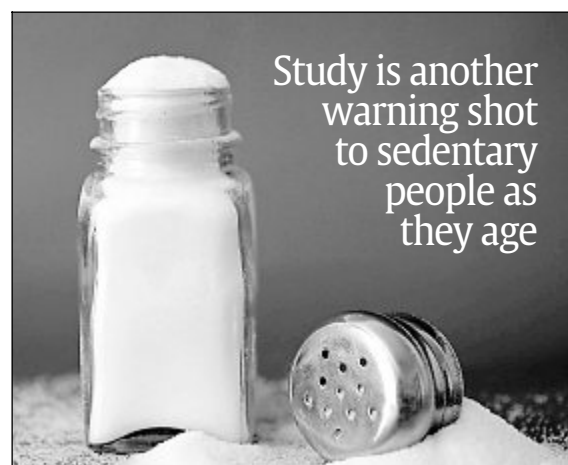
Some got their dietary cholesterol down enough to be close to the normal range, he says. The people following a more vegetarian-type diet lowered their LDL the most, Jenkins says.

Nutrition researcher Linda Van Horn, a professor of preventive medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago, says the study shows that "eating more of these simple, inexpensive ingredients such as oatmeal, barley and beans, peas and lentils can have a significant impact on lowering blood cholesterol and risk for a heart attack — one forkful at a time."

By consuming these types of foods, some people whose cholesterol is borderline high might be able to avoid taking medications, and those with high cholesterol might be able to lower the amount of medication they need to take, says Gina Lundberg, a spokeswoman for the American Heart Association and a preventive cardiologist in Atlanta.

Research shows that only about 15% of your cholesterol level can be influenced by diet; 85% is genetic, she says.

High salt, low exercise are bad for the brain, not just the body



Study is another warning shot to sedentary people as they age

By Janice Lloyd
USA TODAY

Research has shown consuming too much salt and being inactive leads to heart disease, but now a new study shows the same combination also can be bad for brain health.

Canadian researchers studied the salt intake and physical activity levels of 1,262 healthy men and women ages 67 to 84 over three years and found those with the highest levels of sodium (3,091 milligrams a day and greater) and the lowest levels of exercise tended to show poorer cognitive performance than those with a low sodium intake and an active

lifestyle. The findings were published in the journal *Neurobiology of Aging*.

"These findings are important because they help people know they can be proactive in retaining healthy brains as they age," says Carol Greenwood, one of the study's lead researchers and a professor at the Baycrest Center for Geriatric Care at the University of Toronto. "Baby Boomers especially need to know that sitting on the couch watching television for long periods of time and eating salty snacks is not good for them."

Four million to 5 million adults in the USA have some form of dementia, and those numbers are expected to soar as Baby Boomers grow older.

Among other findings: Sedentary older adults showed no cognitive decline over the three years if they had low sodium intake.

One teaspoon of salt is equal to 2,000 milligrams. In the study, low and medium sodium intake were defined as not exceeding 2,263 and 3,090 milligrams respectively.

"This is one of the first studies that looks at sodium," says Deborah Barnes, a dementia expert at the University of California-San Francisco, who was not associated with the study. "It's another important point about diet. You need to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables and stay away from processed foods."

Hold the salt

Daily recommended sodium limits:

2,300 milligrams or less for many people

1,500 milligrams or less for people who are 51 and older and those of any age who are African American or have hypertension, diabetes or chronic kidney disease.

Source: FDA's Dietary Guidelines for Americans

By Katye Martens, USA TODAY