

BODY MASS INDEX AND BLOOD PRESSURE IN OVO-LACTO-VEGETARIANS

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The purpose of the present paper is to examine the nutritional status and blood pressure values of an ovo-lacto-vegetarian sample. Our case-control study surveyed 90 confirmed adult ovo-lacto-vegetarians who followed an ovo-lacto-vegetarian diet for at least 2 years against a control group of 102 nonvegetarians living in the same urban environment. Subjects' weight, height and blood pressure were measured and the mean BMI and blood pressure values of ovo-lacto-vegetarians and nonvegetarians were compared. We found that the BMI mean value was lower in ovo-lacto-vegetarians (22.51 kg/m^2) than in nonvegetarians (24.33 kg/m^2). The average blood pressure was $115.7/67.6 \text{ mm Hg}$ for the ovo-lacto-vegetarians and $123.5/72.2$ for the control group, difference that is statistically significant for $p < 0.01$. Our results sustain the fact that vegetarian diet improves the nutritional status (according to BMI) and blood pressure values.

The obesity problem is recognized in the whole world and represents a real public health problem for many countries, especially for the developed ones. In one study in the U.S.A., over 53% of all deaths in women with a $\text{BMI} > 29 \text{ kg/m}^2$ could be directly attributed to their obesity.[1] Overweight and obesity are associated with a high risk of type II diabetes, especially when the adiposity excess is central disposed, coronary heart diseases and cancer. Unhealthy dietary practices and overweight are among the major biological factors contributing to an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, which are the main causes of global mortality. The WHO attributed one third of all global deaths (15.3 million) to such diseases [2].

Several studies show an association between the vegetarian diets and a decreasing risk for ischaemic heart diseases [3], several types of cancer and all-cause mortality. [4,5] Also, it shows that vegetarians have a low risk of obesity, atonic constipation, lung cancer, alcoholism, hypertension, coronary heart disease and type II diabetes [6,7,8].

Vegetarian diet is not different from the nonvegetarian one just by avoiding meat produces. Some food substances are highly concentrated in vegetarian daily intake: antioxidants, vitamins, enzymes (especially metallo-enzymes), unsaturated vegetable fats, minerals and dietary fibers. These substances can have complementary