

Read the text about research on possible consequences of a plant-based diet. Then choose the correct answer (A, B, C or D) for each question (1-7). Put a cross (☒) in the correct box on the answer sheet. The first one (0) has been done for you.

Health effects of veganism

The idea that avoiding meat is bad for our brains makes some intuitive sense; anthropologists have been arguing about what our ancestors ate for decades, but many scientists think that there was a lot of bone-crunching and brain-slurping on the road to evolving these remarkable 1.4kg (3lb) organs. Some have even gone so far as to say that meat made us human.

One reason is that intelligence is expensive – the brain devours about 20% of our daily calories, though it accounts for just 2% of our body weight – and what better way to find the enormous array of fats, amino acids, vitamins and minerals these fastidious organs require, than by feasting on animals which have already painstakingly collected or made them.

But though it's hard to imagine our ancestors choosing turnips over tuna, today it's a different story. According to the latest statistics, there are around 375 million vegetarians on the planet. In the West, veganism has ditched the hippie stigma to become one of the fastest-growing millennial trends; in the United States, it grew by 600% between 2014 and 2017. Meanwhile in India, meat-free diets have been mainstream since the 6th century BCE.

On the one hand, recent concern about the nutritional gaps in plant-based diets has led to a number of alarming headlines, including a warning that they can stunt brain development and cause irreversible damage to a person's nervous system. Back in 2016, the German Society for Nutrition went so far as to categorically state that – for children, pregnant or nursing women, and adolescents – vegan diets are not recommended, which has been backed up by a 2018 review of the research. After the Royal Academy of Medicine in Belgium decided a vegan diet was “unsuitable” for children, parents who force a vegan diet on their offspring in Belgium could even one day find themselves in prison.

But on the other, if abstaining from meat had any real impact on our brains, you would think that we would already have noticed. So is it really damaging our intellects, or is this all just fear of the unknown? Ideally, to test the impact of the vegan diet on the brain, you would take a randomly selected group of people, ask half to stop eating animal products – then see what happens. But there isn't a single study like this.

Instead, the only research that comes close involved the reverse. It was conducted on 555 Kenyan schoolchildren, who were fed one of three different types of soup – one with meat, one with milk, and one with oil – or no soup at all, as a snack over seven school terms. They were tested before and after, to see how their intelligence compared. Because of their economic circumstances, the majority of the children were de facto vegetarians at the start of the study.

Surprisingly, the children who were given the soup containing meat each day seemed to have a significant edge. By the end of the study, they outperformed all the other children on a test for non-verbal reasoning. Along with the children who received soup with added oil, they also did the best on a test of arithmetic ability. Of course, more research is needed to verify if this effect is real, and if it would also apply to adults in developed countries, too. But it does raise intriguing questions about whether veganism could be holding some people back.

0 **Some researchers claim that, for humans, eating animal products**

- A has negative health effects.
- B is an essential part of evolution.**
- C could put an end to world hunger.
- D is avoidable nowadays.

- 1 **People's diet could affect their mental capacity because**
 - A brain function slows down while eating.
 - B chemicals interfere with neurological processes.
 - C human intelligence is connected to the weight of the brain.
 - D thinking uses a comparatively high amount of energy.

- 2 **In one part of Asia, being a vegetarian**
 - A is still considered upper-class.
 - B has only recently become accepted.
 - C is seen as a sign of poverty.
 - D has been widespread for a long time.

- 3 **Worries about vegan malnutrition**
 - A alarmed families of teenagers.
 - B were debated at various medical conferences.
 - C caused sensational media coverage.
 - D turned out to be without any reason.

- 4 **Official nutritional guidelines in Germany**
 - A are published regularly.
 - B were confirmed by a later scientific study.
 - C forbid veganism for teenagers.
 - D were revised two years later.

- 5 **In the future, families who only feed their children plant-based products**
 - A could be breaking the law in a European country.
 - B may be seen as caring about their children's health.
 - C will do so due to lack of money to buy meat.
 - D will often be animal rights activists.

- 6 **The pupils analysed in one study**
 - A were put into four groups.
 - B were malnourished.
 - C had to pass a test.
 - D had to stop eating meat.

- 7 **Concerning maths skills, a Kenyan study showed that**
 - A dairy products have the same effect as meat.
 - B eating meat only has a minimal effect.
 - C the effect of meat is similar to another ingredient.
 - D results can easily be generalised.

Health effects of veganism

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Von der
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