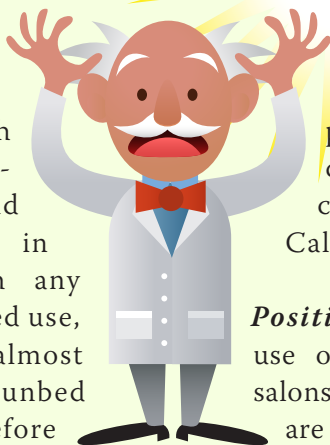


**Sunbeds and Melanoma Risk** — age 35. New ultraviolet tanning units may deliver 10-15 times the levels of ultraviolet A compared to the mid-day sun on the coast of southern California.<sup>4</sup>

The popularity of indoor tanning is rising, and so is the risk of melanoma. French and Italian scientists have found a 20% increase in melanoma with any amount of sunbed use, but the risk almost doubles when sunbed usage starts before



**PositiveTip:** Avoid the use of indoor tanning salons, especially if you are under 35.



### Like the Health Tips?

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Helping You to Better Health

## Grass Eaters?

By Fred Hardinge, DrPH, RD

The other day I saw a graphic which had several panes, each with a caption under it. One was labeled, “What others think I eat!” and the picture was a field of grass. Another said, “What my boss thinks I eat!” and the picture was a bed of daisies. The final pane was labeled, “What I really eat!” and the picture was a sumptuous table of delicious vegetarian food.

It is certainly true that over the years there has been much misunderstanding about what vegetarians eat. While still a relatively small percentage of the population follow a vegetarian dietary pattern, this group has grown rapidly in the last couple of decades.

Years of research has demonstrated a balanced, well-chosen vegetarian diet has distinct benefits, and provides all the nutrition humans need. It has been almost

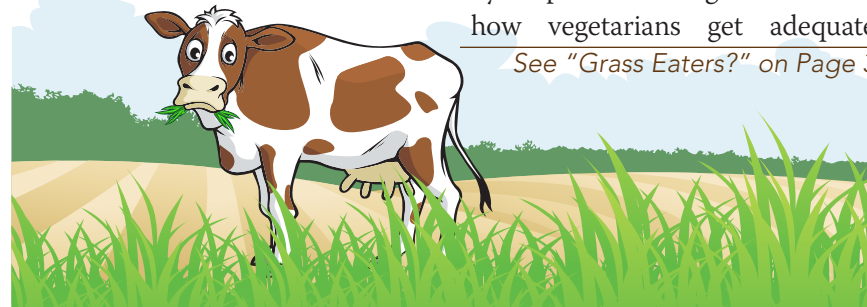
60 years since the publication of the first comprehensive research demonstrating this.<sup>1</sup> Yet some questions still persist.

As a life-long vegetarian nutritionist I was delighted to see the publication in June of a 45 page supplement to the *Medical Journal of Australia* titled “Is a vegetarian diet adequate?”<sup>2</sup> It very candidly examines the concepts and controversies of plant-based eating.

While targeted at health professionals, this issue is a valuable resource for anyone contemplating or consuming a vegetarian diet. Unlike much excellent published research, each article in this issue is “open-access”, meaning it is available without charge on the internet.

The topics include the economic and ecological advantages of plant-based eating; the quality and quantity of protein in vegetarian diets; how vegetarians get adequate

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## Beware of the Epidemiologic Dragon

By Max Hammonds, MD, MPH

When someone says a certain activity “causes” another event to occur, it should be backed up by some very good studies in one of two ways. One method is for a group of people to be given activity A and then monitored for specific result B, and then the same group of people not to be allowed activity A and again monitored for result B.

Alternatively, two groups of people, as alike as possible (to rule out other causes), are selected. One group is given activity A and the other group is not. Both groups are monitored for result B. This approach is applicable



to the case of smoking or eating fruits and vegetables, where the time is too long for the appearance of cancer and the appearance of cancer cannot be taken away to complete the second phase of the study.

As you can imagine, it is impossible and probably unethical to have one group of people specifically smoke or specifically not eat fruits and vegetables just to see if they get cancer. The next best thing is to find two groups of people as alike as

possible (to rule out other interfering variables), one of which already does activity A, and the other of which does not do activity A, and then watch them over time to look for result B.

Comparing groups of people to each other or to information gathered on the population in general is the stuff of epidemiology, an attempt

to ferret out possible relationships between known activities and observed results—probable cause.

However, these kinds of studies do not prove “cause.” Just because a person does activity A and gets result B does not

mean that A caused B. There might be another activity C (which might or might not be related to activity A) that caused result B. While epidemiologists try to eliminate these possibilities with statistics, epidemiological studies cannot prove that activity A “causes” result B.

Don’t dismiss these studies, but be careful. These studies tell us where to go looking for probable cause. While in some cases (like making people

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### “Grass Eaters?” from Page 1

amounts of zinc, iron, vitamin B12 and the omega-3 fatty acids; and concludes with very practical advice on how to prepare healthy and tasty plant-based meals.

If you only have limited time (like most of us!), do not neglect to read the last article<sup>3</sup>, as it is a wonderful summary of the advantages of plant-based eating, meal planning tips, shopping tips, and cooking tips. The publisher and authors actually encourage the reproduction of this article for educational purposes!

So, if your family or friends think you only eat grass, you now know where to find information to help dispel myths like:

- » *You can’t get enough protein on a vegetarian diet.*
- » *Vegetarians need to combine proteins at each meal.*
- » *Vegetarians need to take supplements.*

» *Dairy foods are the only good source of calcium*

» *Pregnant women should not be on a vegetarian diet.*

» *Children can’t thrive on vegetarian diets.*

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### “Dragon” from Page 2

smoke to see if they get cancer) these studies cannot be done with people, they can be done with animals that closely approximate people. The results can then be theorized to have a similar effect in people.

When you read these studies or hear them on the news, ask yourself – “does this make sense?” Did they prove that activity A actually “causes” result B? Or is there just a suspicion and more well-controlled studies are called for?

Read carefully and thoughtfully. Don’t assume causality, but don’t ignore the warning either.

