

The Power of Plant-based eating and no, Vegans are not less intelligent.

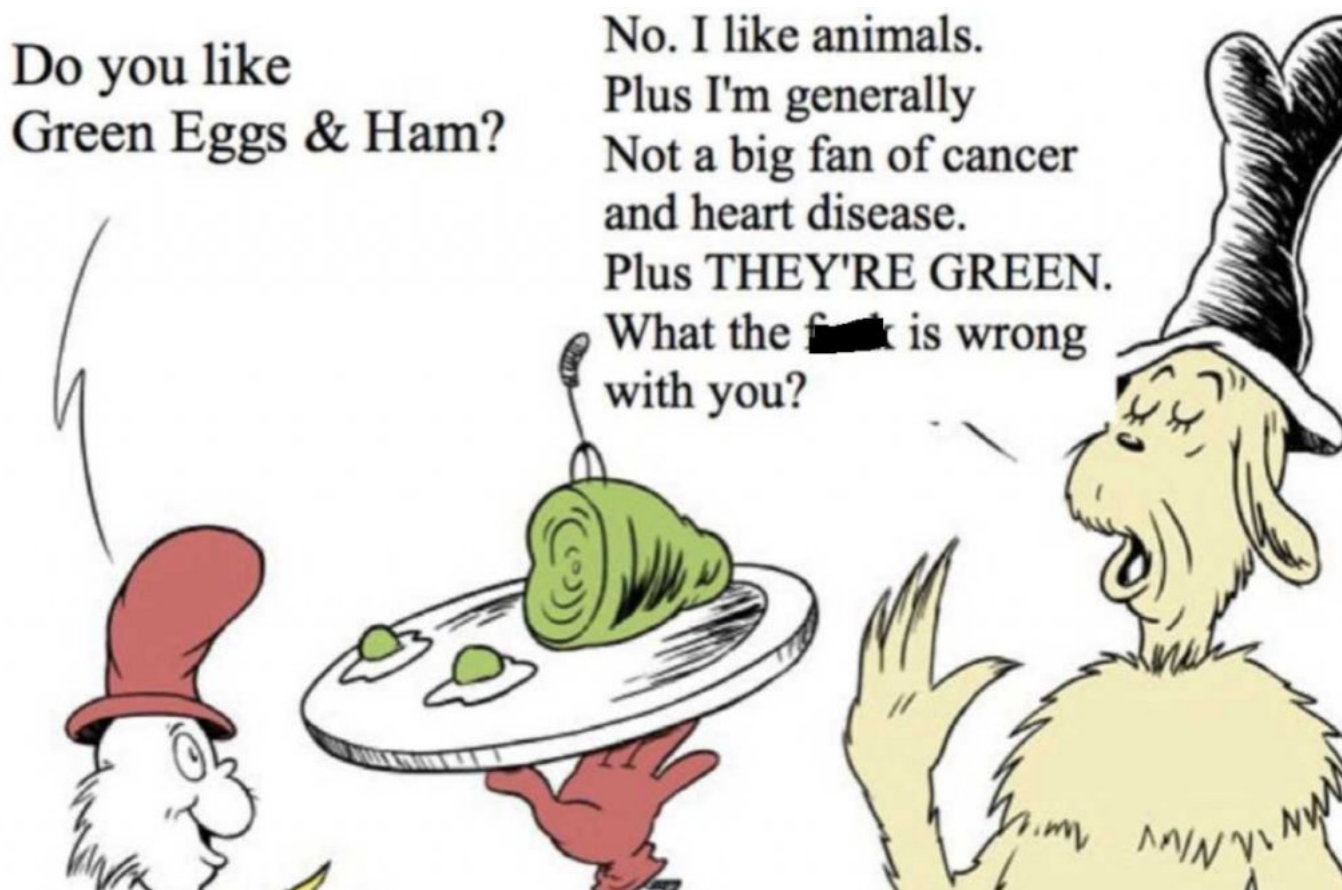


Image source: <https://mobile.twitter.com/thelittleidiot/status/942919184295612417> (Accessed: 8th February 2020)

Take a walk down your local high street and you'll see fast food chains such as Burger King advertising their, '[impossible whopper burger](#)' (1) and lunch-time queues outside Greggs filled with customers avidly waiting to try the vegan sausage roll. Log onto Instagram and you'll see influencers promoting their Veganuary recipes or switch on your television to see [Piers Morgan](#) (2) ranting about his hatred for uppity vegans and love for meat-eating culture. The rise of the vegan movement is truly like no other.

I recently watched a [TEDtalk delivered by Ed Winters](#) (3); an animal rights activist on why arguments against veganism can be considered insubstantial in terms of morality. For example, the idea of personal choice is often put forward by non-vegans, citing moral acceptability on the basis of free autonomous choice. 'I can eat what I want'. The problem here is that a free autonomous choice is all well and good until it involves a victim who suffers as a consequence of these choices. The artificial insemination of cows for milk production or mass-slaughtering of chickens to supply for our immense [65 billion](#) (4) figure intake is simply put immoral. The fleeting minute of sensory pleasure that comes from our morning bowl of coco-pops or late-night Big Mac craving comes at the expense of a life. A harsh-reality that really hit home for me. It was refreshing to see Winters' perspective on veganism that didn't guilt-shame the perpetrator (in this case those of us consuming animal products) but rather taking a rational, relatable approach in acknowledging reasons for consumption and identifying flaws in the argument from multi-dimensional perspectives. This most definitely appears to be the best way of conveying messages particularly those related to lifestyle choices affecting public health most convincingly. During the 1960s the term 'vegan' was often associated with [hate](#) [connotations](#) or [with angry protestors](#) (5) holding blood red 'murderer' plaques outside parliament. Today however, veganism is attached to much friendlier images. Many [celebrities](#) (6) including Moby, Beyoncé and Bill Clinton have opted for a plant-based diet with many actively promoting the benefits of veganism to fans via social media platforms; it really has become a cultural phenomenon.

Global meat consumption is on the rise, growing at around [3% a year](#) (4), although the growth in Europe and the US is slowing down, the rest of the developing world is consuming more than ever before. Primary reasons behind [why people choose to go vegan](#) (7) include a 'perfect plant-based storm of factors' be it, animal welfare, personal health or environmental concerns. Previously many would have deemed a classic vegan diet to consist of Buddha bowls and tofu salads but today close to every high-street restaurant offers vegan dishes from pizzas to Chinese, your local corner shop will likely sell alternative non-dairy milk. With such an array of plant-based alternatives readily available on the market it leaves us with no excuse not to substitute at least a few of our regular animal products for the greater good.

A recently published BBC Future article titled, '[How a vegan diet could affect your intelligence](#)' (8) has stirred various emotions amongst the vegan community. Claims put forward citing lack of specific nutrient intake through a plant-based diet causing reduced intelligence is not only highly controversial but lacks scientific integrity in its use of outdated, incorrect 'evidence'. There is reference to a [study conducted on Kenyan school-children](#) (9) who were fed one of 3 types of soup; meat, milk or oil. The aim of the study was to see the impact of diet on intelligence before and after. The results described children given meat soup to have a significant edge; outperforming all other children in tests for non-verbal reasoning and equally as well on arithmetic to kids who had consumed the oil soup. It makes me question whether the 'standard' metric for measuring intelligence is purely through quantitative written examinations? Moreover, many of these children were defacto vegetarians at the beginning of the study hence consumption of meat will inevitably trigger a reaction in a body that is consuming irregular produce thus, generalisability to the global population is unjustified. A more practical study would measure the impact of meat consumption compared to a balanced plant-based diet including protein-rich supplements such as soy, nuts etc.

The article states, 'It is hard to imagine our ancestors choosing turnips over tuna' this remark commonly argued to support the viewpoint that [meat-eating made us human](#) has not yet been proven scientifically accurate. Basing our lifestyle choices off decisions made by primitive societies is surely backwards-thinking? Just because we are physically able to consume something that doesn't substantiate our moral purpose in doing so. The vitamins stated to be lacking in a plant-based diet including B12, Iron and taurine can quite easily be obtained through an array of fruits, veg, whole grains and additional supplements. Just like any other person not all vegans eat the same; this doesn't necessarily equate to a deprived diet. There are many unknown gaps in our knowledge of what the human brain needs in order to be healthy. However authorities including the [NHS](#) (11) and the [British Dietetic Association](#) (12) approve of a vegan diet as being healthy for all stages of life including during childhood, pregnancy and for breastfeeding mothers.

[Oxford Academic Dr Marco Springmann has used modelling to predict what a vegan planet would look like](#) (13). He projected that if the world were to adopt a vegan diet by 2050, the global economy would benefit around \$1.1 trillion in savings on healthcare costs and a cut in greenhouse emissions by 2/3rds. Such numbers are surely hard to believe with? The report entirely neglects the various health, environmental and social benefits that are reaped from such a lifestyle change; reinforcing stereotypes of a 'deprived' diet. Such intuitive journalism based off false claims holds the potential to spread false public health messages whilst triggering anti-movements that naively trust that there is a need for change to our current inefficient, exploitative system of animal agriculture.

Feel free to leave a comment in the section below letting me know what you think about the vegan movement. Will you be making the lifestyle change?

Appendix

1. [Villas-Boas A. I'm a meat eater, and I tried the new Impossible Whopper from Burger King — here's my verdict \[Internet\]. Business Insider. 2019 \[cited 9 February 2020\]. Available from: <https://www.businessinsider.com/burger-king-impossible-whopper-review-2019-8?r=US&IR=T>](#)
2. [Good Morning Britain. Piers Morgan's Most Fiery Vegan Debates Ever! \[Internet\]. 2019 \[cited 9 February 2020\]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08y5RrhgPcA>](#)
3. [Winters E. Every Argument Against Veganism \[Internet\]. 2019 \[cited 9 February 2020\]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byTxzzztRBU>](#)
4. [Lewis T. Have we hit 'peak beef'? \[Internet\]. The Guardian. 2019 \[cited 8 February 2020\]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/mar/16/peak-beef-ethical-food-climate-change>](#)
5. [Nguyen S. The Rise of Vegan Culture \[Internet\]. Harvard Magazine. 2017 \[cited 10 February 2020\]. Available from: <https://harvardmagazine.com/2017/07/the-rise-of-vegan-culture>](#)
6. [Smith J. Vegan celebrities who are inspiring us to adopt a plant-based diet for 2020 \[Internet\]. Glamourmagazine.co.uk. 2020 \[cited 11 February 2020\]. Available from: <https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/gallery/celebrities-who-are-vegan>](#)
7. [BBC Radio 4 - Radio 4 in Four - Seven reasons why people are going vegan \[Internet\]. BBC. 2016 \[cited 10 February 2020\]. Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/5PBX369GxWfBHFHFRkCvCl/seven-reasons-why-people-are-going-vegan>](#)
8. [Gorvett Z. How a vegan diet could affect your intelligence \[Internet\]. BBC Future. 2020 \[cited 7 February 2020\]. Available from: <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200127-how-a-vegan-diet-could-affect-your-intelligence>](#)
9. [Whaley S, Sigman M, Neumann C, Bwibo N, Guthrie D, Weiss R et al. The impact of dietary intervention on the cognitive development of Kenyan school children. The Journal of Nutrition \[Internet\]. 2003 \[cited 11 February 2020\];133\(11\):3965–3971. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/14614614>](#)
10. [Kluger J. Sorry Vegans: Here's How Meat-Eating Made Us Human \[Internet\]. Time. 2016 \[cited 11 February 2020\]. Available from: <https://time.com/4252373/meat-eating-veganism-evolution/>](#)
11. [Vegetarian and vegan diets Q&A \[Internet\]. nhs.uk. 2020 \[cited 9 February 2020\]. Available from: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/vegetarian-and-vegan-diets-q-and-a/>](#)
12. [British Dietetic Association confirms well-planned vegan diets can support healthy living in people of all ages \[Internet\]. British Dietetic Association. 2017 \[cited 12 February 2020\]. Available from: <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/british-dietetic-association-confirms-well-planned-vegan-diets-can-support-healthy-living-in-people-of-all-ages.html>](#)
13. [Hancox D. The unstoppable rise of veganism: how a fringe movement went mainstream \[Internet\]. The Guardian. 2018 \[cited 8 February 2020\]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/apr/01/vegans-are-coming-millennials-health-climate-change-animal-welfare>](#)

Comments