# Plant-rich diets linked to longer life and healthier ageing in new large-scale studies



Research continues to strengthen the case for plant-rich diets as a pathway to better health and longevity, with significant studies from Harvard University and the University of Sydney underscoring the benefits of such dietary patterns. Both studies highlight the detrimental effects of high animal protein consumption and the advantages of embracing whole-food, plant-based eating.

The findings from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health surveyed the eating habits and health outcomes of over 105,000 Americans over a staggering 30-year period. They revealed that diet is the second-largest behavioural risk factor for mortality in the US, surpassed only by tobacco use. The researchers evaluated participants based on their adherence to eight dietary patterns that foster healthy ageing, notably focusing on high consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, unsaturated fats, nuts, and legumes, while advising a low to moderate intake of fish and dairy. A disheartening correlation was uncovered: increased consumption of processed meats and sugary beverages was tied to lower probabilities of healthy ageing.

One particularly illuminating statistic indicated that participants who closely followed the Alternative Healthy Eating Index—a diet rich in plant-based whole foods and low in red and processed meats—were 86% more likely to age healthily by age 70 and over twice as likely by age 75. Marta Guasch-Ferré, a co-corresponding author of the study, suggested that these findings could play a crucial role in shaping future dietary guidelines, particularly as calls grow for the US Department of Agriculture to champion plant proteins and reduce red meat consumption.

In a complementary study, experts at the University of Sydney’s Charles Perkins Centre assessed food supply and demographic data from 101 countries over the last six decades. They found that nations with greater availability of plant proteins typically reported higher life expectancies. However, the research also noted that in children under five, easy access to animal proteins was linked to reduced mortality rates, yet emphasised the importance of including plant-based proteins in diets, especially in regions facing malnutrition.

"There is significant evidence that plant-based protein consumption correlates with increased longevity,” explained Alistair Senior, a senior author of the Sydney study. As countries move towards decarbonising food systems, the spotlight on protein sources intensifies, with the data suggesting that shifting dietary habits could yield positive outcomes for both individual health and the environment.

In addition to the Harvard and Sydney studies, other research supports the notion that dietary changes can have a considerable impact on longevity. A separate study from Harvard indicated that substituting butter with plant-based oils, such as olive or canola, could reduce the risk of premature death by as much as 17%. This highlights the transformative potential of replacing harmful fats with healthier alternatives in one’s daily diet.

Furthermore, a comprehensive analysis published in The BMJ examined data from over 715,000 participants, concluding that a mere 3% increase in caloric intake from plant protein sources—like beans and whole grains—could decrease the risk of premature death by 10%. Such findings solidify the premise that even small alterations to one’s diet can lead to substantial health benefits.

As society grapples with the rising popularity of meat and dairy, driven by a combination of political advocacy and cultural habits, the emphasis on plant-rich diets remains crucial. Miyoko Schinner, a proponent of the vegan food movement, emphasised the importance of promoting plant-rich diets over merely focusing on individual meat alternative products, stating that fostering an inclusive understanding of plant-based eating can influence broader dietary shifts.

Overall, the convergence of these studies paints a compelling picture: embracing plant-based foods not only enhances individual health outcomes but also charts a course towards sustainable dietary practices that could benefit populations at large. In a time where dietary preferences are evolving, these findings provide a significant perspective on how what we eat impacts not just our lifespan but the quality of our years ahead.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2. Paragraph 2
3. Paragraph 2
4. Paragraph 3
5. Paragraphs 1, 3, 5
6. Paragraph 1
7. Paragraph 1

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/vegan-diet-plant-based-longevity-healthy-aging-meat-study/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2025/03/a-dietary-swap-that-could-lengthen-your-life/> - A study from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Mass General Brigham found that substituting butter with plant-based oils like soybean, canola, and olive oil daily may lower the risk of premature death by up to 17%. The research analyzed data from over 200,000 individuals followed for more than 30 years, revealing that higher consumption of plant-based oils was associated with reduced mortality from total, cancer, and cardiovascular diseases, while butter use was linked to increased risks. The findings suggest that simple dietary changes can have significant long-term health benefits.
3. <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2024/06/women-who-follow-mediterranean-diet-live-longer/> - A study following over 25,000 U.S. women for up to 25 years found that those who closely adhered to the Mediterranean diet had up to a 23% lower risk of all-cause mortality. The diet, rich in plant-based foods like nuts, seeds, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes, was associated with benefits for both cancer and cardiovascular health. The researchers identified biological changes that may help explain the longevity gains, emphasizing the importance of dietary patterns in promoting health and extending lifespan.
4. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/eat-more-plant-based-proteins-to-boost-longevity> - Research indicates that increasing plant-based protein intake can lower the risk of premature death. A study published in The BMJ analyzed 32 studies involving over 715,000 people and found that obtaining 3% more of total calories from plant protein sources like beans, nuts, and whole grains reduced the risk of premature death by 5%. Another study in JAMA Internal Medicine showed that shifting just 3% of calorie intake from animal to plant protein corresponded with a 10% decrease in death from any cause over 16 years. These findings suggest that incorporating more plant-based proteins into the diet can enhance longevity.
5. <https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/vegan-diet-plant-based-longevity-healthy-aging-meat-study/> - Recent studies from Harvard University and the University of Sydney highlight the health benefits of plant-rich diets in promoting longevity. The Harvard study found that adherence to plant-based dietary patterns was linked to better cognitive, physical, and mental health, with participants 86% more likely to age healthily at 70 years. The University of Sydney's research revealed that nations with higher availability of plant proteins had longer life expectancies. These findings underscore the importance of plant-based diets in enhancing health and extending lifespan.
6. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7613518/> - The EPIC-Oxford study found that vegetarians had a 23% lower risk of ischemic heart disease compared to meat-eaters over 18 years of follow-up. Vegans had an 18% lower risk, though this was not statistically significant due to smaller sample sizes. The combined risk for vegetarians and vegans was 22% lower than that for meat-eaters, suggesting that plant-based diets may offer protective benefits against heart disease.
7. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10792746/> - A cohort study of 2,675 centenarians in China found that higher adherence to plant-based dietary patterns was associated with a lower risk of chronic diseases and all-cause mortality. Participants with higher scores on the Plant-Based Diet Index (PDI), Healthy Plant-Based Diet Index (hPDI), and Healthy Plant-Based Foods Index (HPF) had significantly lower risks of death compared to those with lower scores, highlighting the potential benefits of plant-based diets in promoting longevity.