

How important is meat in your diet? Could you happily live without ever eating any meat? In the UK vegetarianism is becoming more and more popular.

Vegetarianism is increasing in the UK as more and more British people are deciding not to eat meat and animal products. According to the UK Vegetarian Society, 2,000 people are giving up meat and 'going veggie' in Britain every week. There's even a National Vegetarian Week organised every year to encourage people to try a meat-free lifestyle.

Vegetarians and vegans

In 1989 a poll indicated that three per cent of the UK's population was vegetarian. A more recent poll put it at 5.7 per cent. This means there are over three million vegetarians in the UK today.

Vegetarians (people who don't eat meat) and vegans (people who don't eat or use any animal products) are both becoming increasingly common in UK culture. Visit a British supermarket and you will see a wide range of vegetarian ingredients and prepared meals on the shelves, including vegetarian sausages, vegan cheese (it doesn't contain milk!) and meat-free burgers.

A healthy diet

So why are Brits cutting out meat from their diets? Many vegetarians and vegans choose not to eat meat or animal products for ethical reasons. They are unhappy about the bad treatment of the animals and the effects of meat and fish production on the environment. Worries about food safety (for example BSE, or 'mad cow disease', as it is commonly known) cause many people to stop eating meat. Others choose to change their diet to improve their general health. According to the Vegetarian Society, a meat-free diet could help reduce the risk of certain cancers and the possibility of heart disease, as well as other health problems such as obesity and high blood pressure.

Organic farming

Another rising trend in the UK's food culture is related to how our food is produced. Many people are rejecting GM (genetically modified) food and intensive farming procedures. They want their food to be organically farmed. What exactly does 'organic' mean? Organic food is produced in a more natural way. Organic farmers use no or very few chemicals, pesticides or fertilisers. Organic farming isn't only for plant crops: animals can also be farmed organically. Organic meat is produced without the use of drugs and antibiotics. Organically farmed animals also have better living conditions, for example more space and more nutritious food.

Organic food

According to the Soil Association, the UK's leading organisation for organic food and farming, three out of every four households in the UK now buy some types of organic food. Some people buy organic meat, fruit and vegetables from farmers' markets, where local farmers sell their products directly to the consumer. Others have a box of organic mixed fruit and vegetables delivered to their homes each week. Many people buy organic produce in their local supermarket. As with vegetarianism, people choose organic foods for health reasons or because of concern for the environment. Although it's often more expensive, fans of organic food say it tastes much better!