

Vegetarianism touted as "healthful eating"

By Dianne Cornish

Many Canadians on high-fat, meat-based diets face the risk of becoming overweight and developing heart problems, registered dietician Pam Mitchell told guests attending a recent seminar at Wastewise, in Georgetown.

Mitchell, a Georgetown resident who works in Toronto, was a guest speaker at a vegetarianism seminar which attracted close to 70 people. Also addressing the crowd was Lori King, manager of Alternatives Natural Foods, in Oakville.

Both women talked about healthy eating habits and discussed various aspects of vegetarian diets. Vegetarians don't eat meat, but subsist on a diet of vegetables, fruit, nuts and grains.

"It's a whole different way of eating," King, a 14-year vegetarian, told the audience. Recommending that people do some research before changing their eating practices, she said: "One of the first things to do when you start vegetarian eating is to get a good cookbook."

"Vegetarianism is a really healthful way to eat for a lot of people," King said, noting that she decided to drop meat from her diet more than 10 years ago because of the sugar, salt, artificial ingredients, antibiotics and hormones contained in meat.

She later told the crowd that many myths about meat still exist.

"Meat isn't the only source of protein (in diets), it isn't the sole source of vitamins and minerals

and it isn't the only source of amino acids," she stressed.

While Mitchell isn't a vegetarian, she is concerned, as a dietician, that people eat well. "It's not my job to tell you to be a vegetarian," she said.

However, she acknowledged that vegetarian diets are low in fat and, as a result, have been identified as healthful eating.

Variety is an important feature in everyone's diet, she said, because "people need 50 different nutrients per day to eat healthy." She emphasized that "no one food can provide this."

The average adult requires about 65 grams of protein daily, but "many of us eat more than 100 grams per day," Mitchell remarked. While meat is high in protein, there are other sources, such as grains, cereals and legumes, she said, noting that "one cup of beans is equivalent to one serving of meat."

Mitchell also spoke about the body's need for calcium and iron. Dairy products, such as yogurt and cheese, are high in calcium and it's possible to get the required calcium

intake on a vegetarian diet, although "it's harder for those (vegetarians) who exclude dairy products from their diet," she observed.

"Iron is one of the hardest things to get on a vegetarian diet," Mitchell said. However, vegetable and grain products contain iron and there are steps that can be taken to help the body absorb it. Vitamin C, contained in tomatoes, broccoli and citrus fruits, help the body retain iron.

About a dozen people raised their hands when King asked if there were any vegetarians in the crowd. After she expalined her reasons for becoming a vegetarian, she asked audience members to do the same.

One woman said she simply doesn't like the taste or texture of meat. A young man said he wants to eat healthy and take care of his body. A middle-aged woman said she is a Zen Buddhist and people in her religion believe animals are equal to humans.

People decide to become vegetarians for a variety of reasons, King stated. Politics, religion and economics often influence their deci-

sion, she added. "Most of the people in the Third World are vegetarians because they cannot afford or get meat."

The vegetarianism seminar was the second of three information meetings organized this summer by Bill Wray and Marina Biasutti, two students working on the Environmental Youth Corps at Wastewise.

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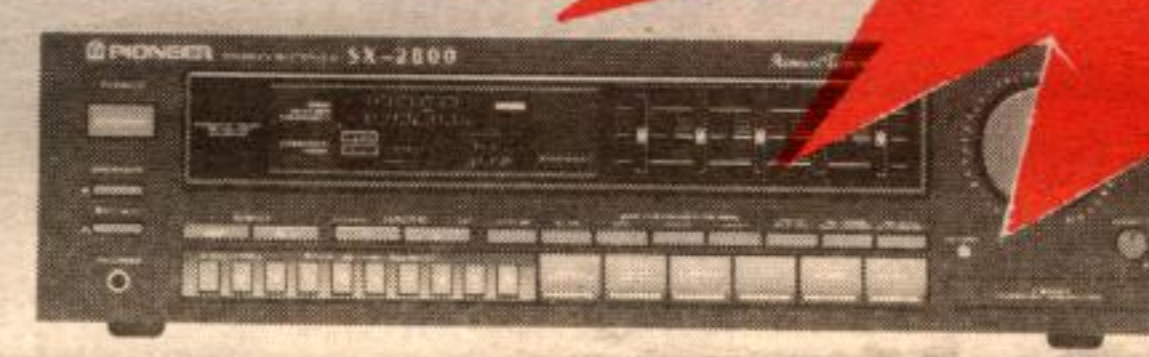
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