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**The New York Times**

Sunday, April 11, 2010

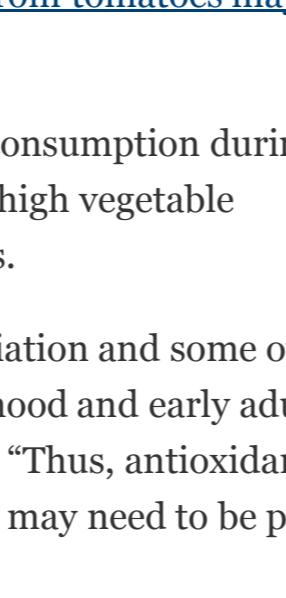
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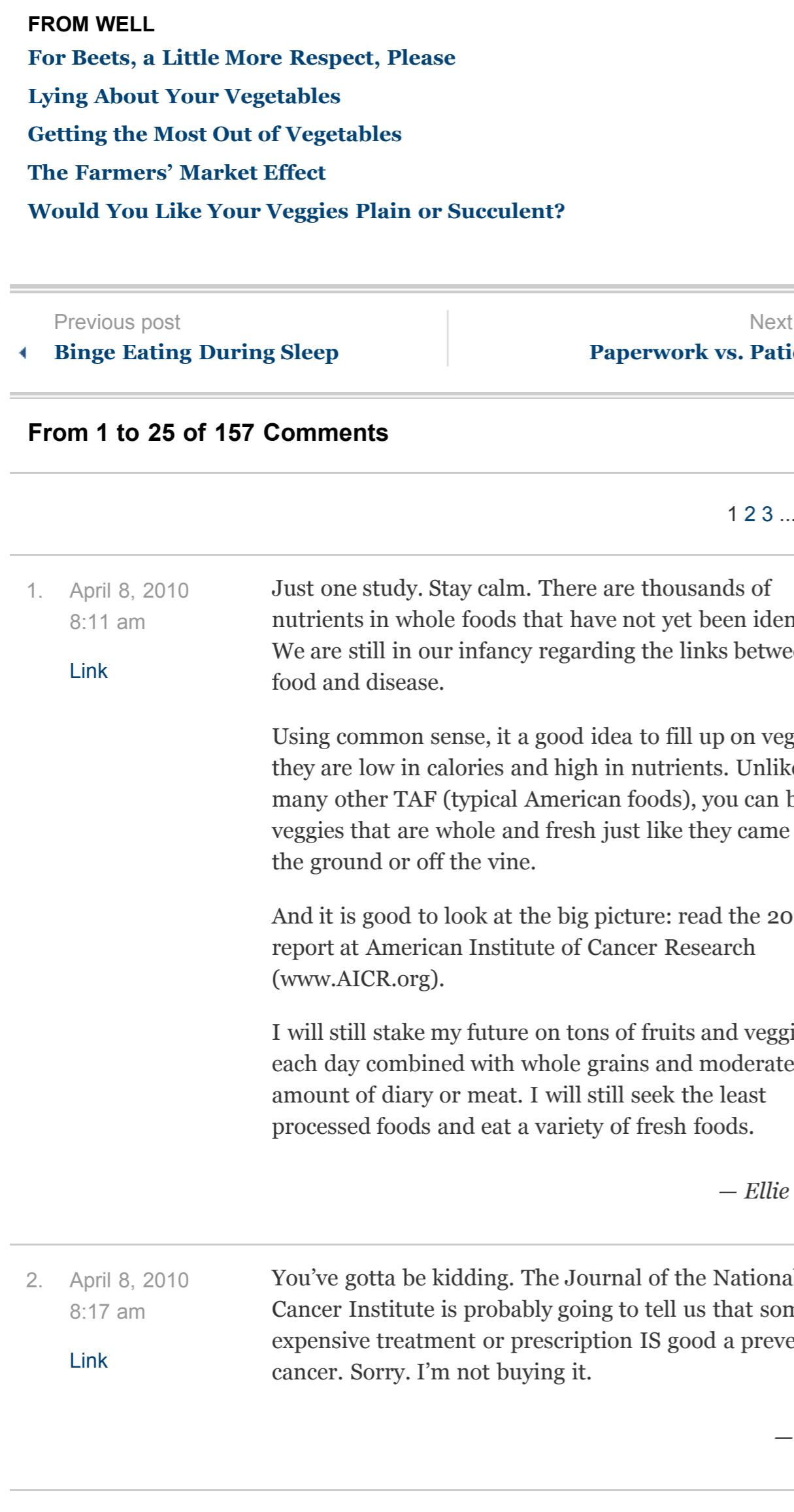
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**Well****Tara Parker-Pope on Health**

April 8, 2010, 7:08 AM

**Eating Vegetables Doesn't Stop Cancer**

By TARA PARKER-POPE



Randy Harris for The New York Times

Eating more veggies probably won't prevent cancer, but it may improve your heart health.

A major study tracking the eating habits of 478,000 Europeans suggests that consuming lots of fruits and vegetables has little if any effect on preventing cancer.

**The study**, published in the current issue of *The Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, is the latest in a series of studies to debunk the potential of vegetables for lowering cancer risk, but the results don't mean you should push those greens off your plate.

A number of studies show that high vegetable consumption is associated with lower risk for cardiovascular disease. In addition, there is still some evidence that certain vegetables contain potent cancer-fighting compounds. And the latest study also suggested a potentially higher anticancer benefit of eating vegetables for people who regularly drink alcohol.

As a result, campaigns urging Americans to eat more vegetables are likely to continue.

"We now have much more information from prospective studies on intake of fruits and vegetables in relation to risk of cardiovascular disease," said Dr. Walter C. Willett, chairman of the department of nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health. "Thus the advice should continue, but the benefit will be primarily for heart disease and stroke."

The European study tracked 142,605 men and 335,873 women for an average of nearly nine years. Eating more vegetables was associated with a small but statistically significant reduction in cancer risk. The data translates into a 4 percent lower risk of cancer for every two extra servings of vegetables a day a person eats.

While the findings suggest at least a small lower risk of cancer among those who eat lots of vegetables, the slight difference could be explained by a number of variables, like reporting errors among the study subjects or the fact that vegetable eaters also are less likely to smoke or drink to excess. In addition, a 4 percent reduction in relative risk offers very little practical benefit to an individual. For instance, a person with a 10 percent risk of getting cancer over the next eight years would, at best, lower his or her risk to just 9.6 percent by eating two extra servings of vegetables a day.

Dr. Willett noted that the study results don't speak to the potential of specific types of vegetables and fruits in reducing cancer risk. For example, several studies over the years have suggested that [lycopene from tomatoes may lower prostate cancer risk](#).

In addition, because the study focused on vegetable consumption during adulthood, it doesn't tell us much about the effect of high vegetable consumption during childhood and the teenage years.

"Multiple lines of evidence indicate that ionizing radiation and some other risk factors for cancer can operate primarily in childhood and early adult life," Dr. Willett wrote in an accompanying editorial. "Thus, antioxidants or other protective constituents of fruits and vegetables may need to be present at that time to be effective."

Most important is the fact that a large body of evidence shows that increasing vegetable consumption is good for your heart. In 2004, Harvard researchers reported on [data collected from more than 100,000 nurses and doctors](#). Although the study showed no link between cancer risk and vegetable consumption, eating five or more fruit and vegetable servings daily was associated with a 30 percent lower risk of heart disease or stroke compared to those who ate less than 1.5 servings a day.

In 1997, a randomized trial of 500 adults showed that increasing fruit and vegetable intake lowered blood pressure compared with study subjects who ate a typical American diet that is high in fat and low in vegetables.

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Eat Well, Discuss!, vegetables

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1. April 8, 2010 8:11 am

**Link**

Just one study. Stay calm. There are thousands of nutrients in whole foods that have not yet been identified. We are still in our infancy regarding the links between food and disease.

— *Elie Taylor*

2. April 8, 2010 8:17 am

**Link**

You've gotta be kidding. The Journal of the National Cancer Institute is probably going to tell us that some expensive treatment or prescription IS good a preventing cancer. Sorry. I'm not buying it.

— *Laura*

3. April 8, 2010 8:26 am

**Link**

If Willett stopped focusing on fruits and vegetables while promoting gobbling up huge amounts of polyunsaturated fat he might actually stumble upon something that truly does protect against cancer — a diet very low in polyunsaturated fat (less than 2% of calories).

— *Matt Stone*

4. April 8, 2010 9:07 am

**Link**

Don't get all excited about the results of this study.

— *Elie Taylor*

Like Dr. Christopher Gardner of Stanford will tell you — just don't rely on studies based on "self-reported diet diaries".

The only kind of study that would be valid would be if you could supply the foods you wanted to test and force-feed them to 100,000 people for 20 years. Not likely!!

— *Elie Taylor*

He's my point—not all fruits and vegetables are created equal.

Ever hear of the ORAC Index—Oxygen Radical Absorbancy Index—that ranks fruits and vegetables by their ability to neutralize damaging free radical? Or the ANDI Scale?

— *Elie Taylor*

Eating a diet high in kale, collards, Swiss chard, berries, apples, sweet potatoes, and broccoli sprouts is a lot different than eating iceberg lettuce, bananas, white potatoes, and orange juice. What exactly did these people eat?

To get the antioxidant comparisons on fruits and vegetables take a look at:

— *Elie Taylor*

"What the Experts Say About Getting the Most Antioxidants From Our Food: Why We Need Them — How to Best Absorb Them — Cooked or Raw? — Why Organic Matters — The ORAC Index — and the Oz Diet"

[http://www.happyhealthylonglife.com/happy\\_healthy\\_long\\_and.html](http://www.happyhealthylonglife.com/happy_healthy_long_and.html)— *The Healthy Librarian*

5. April 8, 2010 9:08 am

**Link**

This review is overly simplistic. It all depends on the type of vegetable. Root and leafy vegetables do little to reduce cancer risk. However, cruciferous vegetables and those that belong to the Allium family (garlic, onions, leeks, etc) DO reduce cancer risk, by inducing Phase 2 enzymes in our body that prevent carcinogenic agents from binding to our DNA.

— *Shana*

6. April 8, 2010 9:10 am

**Link**

Maybe this will stop some of the self righteous posts from those who are sure they will never get cancer due to their healthy living. Cancer is complicated. You can't control every risk factor.

— *Jango*

7. April 8, 2010 9:12 am

**Link**

Even if this study showed vegetables do not necessarily decrease the risk of cancer, eating veggies will help lead to healthier behaviors and a healthier weight, meaning less stress on the body, which no doubt will help decrease one's chances of veggies. It's all those processed foods that are causing us cancer.

— *FoodFitnessFreshair*

8. April 8, 2010 9:14 am

**Link**

There is an important piece of information missing from your article and possibly missing from the study: that is the amount of meat consumption by the study's participants. There are many well controlled studies that show that cancer risk is reduced not simply by increasing vegetable and fruit consumption, but also by limiting or eliminating the consumption of animal protein. It is unclear whether or not these investigators tracked the consumption of animal protein among their study's cohort, if they did not, this is a serious flaw in the study.

— *William Slammom*

9. April 8, 2010 9:14 am

**Link**

I don't think it matters if eating veggies helps cut the risk of cancer. I'd rather eat the best I can (ie wholesome natural foods) than stuff my body with processed by-products. Treat your body with some respect everyday! (Not just to protect it from diseases)

— *SR*

10. April 8, 2010 9:15 am

**Link**

Well duh! Yet another study. No one really knows how to stop cancer...it has a mind of its own.

— *manrico*

11. April 8, 2010 9:15 am

**Link**

Cut way way back on red meat, stop the white bread madness, cut out/way back on saturated/hydrogenated products, no artificial sweeteners (unless medically necessary), no sodas, no barbecue, limit alcohol, exercise, keep weight normal. Screw the vegetables.

— *r*

12. April 8, 2010 9:16 am

**Link**

This comes as no surprise to followers of Paleo (Paleolithic) Nutrition. Chronically elevated levels of insulin promote cancer in the human body. Guess what the favorite food is of a cancer cell? It isn't red meat. Nor is it saturated fat. The answer: glucose.

— *Ash*

13. April 8, 2010 9:19 am

**Link**

There is real evidence that a ketogenic diet is useful for cancer patients.

— *William Slammom*

14. April 8, 2010 9:22 am

**Link**

It's still not a bad idea to eat a lot of vegetables, cancer otherwise. Can't hurt.

— *jk*

15. April 8, 2010 9:23 am

**Link**

Many people eat foods that are more likely to actually increase the risk of cancer. So, even if a vegetable rich diet doesn't have marked preventive or curative effects, at the very least, more carcinogens are not being added to the pot.

— *L*

16. April 8, 2010 9:26 am

**Link**

All these studies don't show anything, as the real culprit for cancer risk is you know consumption by the study's participants. There are many well controlled studies that show that cancer risk is reduced not simply by increasing vegetable and fruit consumption, but also by limiting or eliminating the consumption of animal protein. It is unclear whether or not these investigators tracked the consumption of animal protein among their study's cohort, if they did not, this is a serious flaw in the study.

— *Don Wiss*

17. April 8, 2010 9:27 am

**Link**

William Slammom (#6) has hit the nail on the head. I didn't even expect that the consumption of fruits and vegetables in and of itself would reduce the chances of getting cancer. What that amount of consumption of fruits and vegetables may do is simply to substitute healthy food in the place of unhealthy food such as meat, processed foods, and the like. By cutting out the unhealthy food, it seems to me that one improves one's health substantially, irrespective of the disease-fighting impacts of eating healthy weight.

— *Andrea Kandel*

18. April 8, 2010 9:28 am

**Link**

Wait long enough and "studies" will show all that's bad for you to be good for you – and vice versa. Life is short so just eat it (or drink it).

— *Bill*

19. April 8, 2010 9:30 am

**Link**

Perhaps the problem is that instead of looking at vegetables as interesting and delicious, we look at them as medicine.

— *JM*

We eat them because they're "good for us." We eat them because they will "make us healthy." We eat them because they will "help reduce the chances of [insert your favorite disease here]." And then when we (or worse, our kids) don't eat "enough," we feel guilty about it.

Try this. Eat vegetables because you like them. Eat vegetables because they make you feel good. Find as many ways as you can to enjoy them. Don't eat the vegetables you don't like, but try something new once a while (I'm amazed at how much I like the taste of an acini bulb, either raw or roasted).

You'll be amazed at how many more you eat. And at how good you feel, even if they don't prevent cancer.

— *JM*

20. April 8, 2010 9:33 am

**Link**

The title should be "Eating Vegetables May Not Stop Cancer". This is one study. I hope it this research doesn't discourage people from eating vegetables. We often forget about general wellness and quality of life, how we feel day-to-day.

— *jt in nj*

FROM TPP — There's definitely more than one study. This is the latest in several to debunk the notion that there is a general cancer benefit to increasing vegetable consumption. But as the story says, we should keep eating vegetables and lots of them.

— *Christy*

21. April 8, 2010 9:37 am

**Link**

As the widow of a man who died at a very young age of cancer, I can personally say that cancer is a very complicated disease. Many factors are involved with the development of cancer.

— *tonyinosa0*

22. April 8, 2010 9:41 am

**Link**

I'd rather eat the best I can (ie wholesome natural foods) than stuff my body with processed by-products.

— *Rebecca*

23. April 8, 2010 9:43 am

**Link**

Treat your body with some respect everyday! (Not just to protect it from diseases)

— &lt;i