



Do Vegans and Vegetarians Stay Vegetarian?

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For more than 18 years, The Vegetarian Resource Group has been **polling** to find the number of vegetarians in the United States. Recently, we wanted to determine the number of people who stay vegetarian. We also examined peoples' original motivation for becoming vegetarian and if there's a link between that reason and the length of time they maintain their diets.

In 2006, we received 267 surveys from readers of Vegetarian Journal, our website, and additional ones collected by volunteers. We resurveyed them again after three years in 2009. In 2012, we resurveyed the same people and received back 131 surveys from individuals who were vegetarian or vegan in 2006. Our methodology is exploratory and further research is necessary to extrapolate to the general population. Note that we don't have information about the non-respondents. See information on our **2009 results**.

The vast majority of vegans and vegetarians stayed at least vegetarian. Our hypothesis was that people who became vegetarian primarily for ethical reasons would be much more likely to stay vegetarian than health vegetarians. This did not hold up, with 93% of health individuals staying vegetarian from 2006 to 2012, and 97% of ethical motivators staying vegetarian. Interestingly, of those who gave the environmental reason, 100% stayed vegetarian. In this article, we can only make conclusions about those who responded in 2006 and 2012.

We also theorized that vegans were more likely to stay vegetarian or vegan than vegetarians who weren't vegan in 2006. We were wrong here as well: 96% of vegetarians stayed vegetarian or vegan while about the same amount, 97% of vegans stayed vegetarian or vegan.

There was much more movement between vegetarian and vegan than we expected. Twenty-two percent of 2006 vegetarians who responded in 2012 became vegan, while 16 percent of 2006 vegans became vegetarian.

Regardless of whether someone had been vegetarian for less than a year or more than 30 years in 2006, there was little difference in the percentage that stayed vegetarian. Breaking down groups by the number of years someone was a vegetarian in 2006, percentages of those groups that were still vegetarian in 2012 ranged from 92% to 100%. We often hear stories in the media of someone who stopped being vegetarian. As with any belief system, it appears there will be a certain number of people who stop or start. However, over a 90% retention rate still seems pretty high. We don't know about those who didn't answer the survey. It's possible that some people who stopped being vegetarian would want to be sure to let us know, while others might have been embarrassed that they strayed from the diet. People's responses may depend on their motivations, experiences, and personality.

In our survey, respondents were asked if they did not eat meat, fish, fowl, dairy, or eggs, and then were classified as vegetarian or vegan (though all vegans are vegetarian). Four percent who started out as vegetarian or vegan in 2006 were no longer vegetarian or vegan. Though this study can't be extrapolated to the general population, we look forward to being able to build upon this research.



In 2012, 131 of our original 267 respondents answered our survey again. Here are those results.

In 2006, 62 people were vegan

In 2012, 81% were still vegan
16% were now vegetarian
3% were not vegetarian

In 2006, 69 people were vegetarian
74% were still vegetarian
22% were now vegan
4% were not vegetarian

Female

In 2006, 51 women were vegetarian

In 2012, 78% were still vegetarian
18% had become vegan

In 2006, 48 women were vegan

In 2012, 81% were still vegan
17% had become vegetarian

Male

In 2006, 18 men were vegetarian



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In 2012, 61% were still vegetarian
33% had become vegan

In 2006, 14 men were vegan

In 2012, 86% were still vegan
7% had become vegetarian

Age in 2006 Still Vegan / Vegetarian in 2012

18-19 100%

20-29 100%

30-39 94%

40-49 100%

50-59 93%

60-69 95%

70 + 100%

Main reason given in 2006 for becoming vegetarian or vegan

Percentage who remained vegetarian or vegan in 2012

Health

93%



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Ethics	97%
Animal Rights	97%
Weight Loss	100%
The Environment	100%
Spiritual Beliefs	85%
Taste	100%
How long participants had been vegan and vegetarian in 2006	Percentage who remained vegetarian or vegan in 2012
Less than one year	100%
1-2 years	100%
3-5 years	100%
6-10 years	92%
11-15 years	94%
16-19 years	93%



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20-25 years	100%
26-29 years	100%
30 or more years	96%